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P. CREED, DICK

Sledgehammer Rapt in Satire

SMETANA AND THE BEETLES. By Albert E. Kahn. Illustrations by David Levine. Random House. 19 pages. \$2.95.

By Dick Creed

WONDER what ever happened to ol' Svetlana Alliluyeva?

You know, the All-American-type Russian girl who left her homeland after her Poppachka died, came to these golden shores and, as one national magazine put it, found God and got rich.

Ol' Svetlana must not be saying or doing anything heartwarming lately, because the magazines, the TV and

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the newspapers don't say much about her anymore.

Lest we forget, Albert E. Kahn and David Levine have produced "Smetana and the Beetles," which they call "a fairy tale for adults." It is a satire as thinly veiled as a sledgehammer wrapped in tissue paper.

Kahn's diabolical tale and Levine's outrageous drawings conspire in a delightful, devastating spoof of everyone involved in the Svetlana caper—Joe

Stalin and his successors, LBJ, the CIA, the U. S. A., the American press and ol' Svetlana herself.

The book is written in blank verse, or something like that, and can be read in less than an hour.

It is the story of a simple, sincere Russian princess who lives with her wicked father in a castle called Gremlin, surrounded by a moat "full of Krokadiles and Vodka."

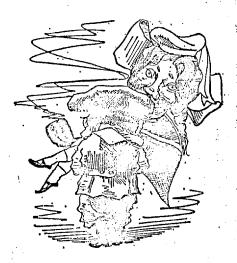
You remember that touching picture of a beaming Poppa Joe carrying little ol' Svetlana? Levine's rendering of this happy scene has Smetana, outweighing Poppa Joe two-to-one, grinning like a combination Mona Lisa-Cheshire Cat as she pecks at a typewriter on Poppa's shoulders.

The tale unfolds with Poppa Joe dying and happy days coming to the realm of Marxdom. "But what was sweet for Ivan was sour for Smetana. People lambasted Poppachka."

Smetana tries the writing game with a piece called "Life With Father in the Gremlin," but somehow it doesn't catch on in the fatherland. So Smetana begins her quest for Peace, Privacy and her Real Self.

The rest is history, as the World Series announcers say, but the history

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books will never record it the way Kahn and Levine do:

-A psychiatrist tells Smetana that the Beetles will help her find her True Ego. "Instead of Nyet! Nyet! Nyet!, they prescribe Yeah! Yeah!"

—She finds the embassy of Freeland, Inc., and learns that in Freeland there is no Gremlin, "only a Fairy Grandfather in a White Ranch House who loved Beagles, Bugles and Bagels, Babies, Barbecues and Brotherhood. Everyone there was Happy or Hippy or Both. Flower Children danced in the streets, and there were fireworks even in the ghettos."

—Smetana gets rich and says all she wants is a camping car and a gypsy dog. The rest can go to homeless elves and aged dwarfs.

—Smetana brings tears to the eyes of tough reporters when she says she has seen the light. She says the lights had never worked in Gremlin, "so she had never noticed that people disappeared. Now, after 15 years, the truth had dawned on her."

—And then there was Smetana's book. It was certain to get good notices. "'A terribly important book,' famous publishers told the press. "It's history, high-class literature and inside stuff. We're sure you'll all agree, since you're publishing it too.'"

We can't be absolutely sure that Kahn and Levine had ol' Svetlana in mind when they created "Smetana." They have included a short disclaimer which says, in way, that they No matter who they had in mind, they have produced a nice little fairytale to add warmth to the American hearthside. Just in time for Christmas too.

Ol' Svetlana will like that.



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